

Meeting Summary Notes – OPH and MECP

Discuss Outdoor Air Quality Complaint - Diesel exhaust

Date and Time: February 14, 2022, 16:00 to 16:30 hours

Attendees:

Ottawa Public Health: Michael Ferguson (Program Manager, Health Hazard Response Team), Martha Robinson (Health Hazard Response Team)

Ottawa District Office, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks:

Tracy Hart (Manager), Erin Legue (Senior Environmental Officer), Emily Tieu (Supervisor)

Meeting Notes:

On February 11, 2022, OPH and the MECP separately received a complaint from an individual who reported headaches when she attends medical appointments in the downtown area impacted by idling trucks. She attends appointments several times a week just inside the area of where many truck protestors are idling diesel fueled vehicles. OPH requested this meeting with the MECP to determine if they would be following up with this complaint; if they are receiving similar complaints and if so, how many; and what role their agency has in responding to complaints of this nature.

The MECP reported

- They have only received a few inquiries and that this is the first complaint about a health impact associated with the truck demonstration that started on January 28, 2022, in Ottawa.
- They will not be taking action as a result of this complaint and suggested to the client that they reach out to Ottawa Public Health. They would only provide monitoring of a regulated activity where the results of the monitoring would be used to control the regulated activity. Further as per the MECP, idling vehicles per se is not a regulated activity and hence better suited to municipal anti-idling by-laws.
- They have not been doing any monitoring of air quality in the downtown area related to the truck demonstrations, and their regional ambient air quality monitor has not indicated any issues that warrant alerting the public to take precautions.
- Should the City of Ottawa request assistance with air quality characterization, they are open to discussing it. The OEM and EOC has their contact information should they want to reach out. They have very limited ability to measure point source air pollution. They suggested that the Ottawa Fire Services have handheld air testing devices that could be used to determine if a point-source air

quality issue are resulting in immediate health hazards. They are aware that the City has told the public to avoid the areas of impact for their health and safety.

Ottawa Public Health reported:

- We have received a few inquiries and one complaint about health effects related to the idling of diesel vehicles in the downtown areas affected by truck protestors.
- We have responded to all inquiries with information as follows:

The City and the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) have been managing multiple dimensions of the protest with the health and safety of city staff, the public, and protestors first and foremost in their planning.

The outdoor air monitor in Ottawa operated by ECCC and the MECP has not indicated any issues of concern this past week. The monitor is located downtown close to Rideau Street and the Rideau River <http://www.airqualityontario.com/aqhi/today.php?sites=51001> and measures regional air quality in the City of Ottawa, not point source pollution. This monitor cannot determine the air quality close to a point source of air pollution. For this reason, ambient air quality can be “low risk” while at the same time, very near a point source, the risk level could be higher. For this reason and many others, the public has been asked not to enter the zone of impact downtown. Ottawa Public Health is supportive of all efforts from the City and OPS to address the source of these air quality concerns. I am providing this link to information on the health risks of air pollution from Health Canada for your information: <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/health-risks.html>.

Both the MECP and OPH agreed that should new issues arise about ambient or point-source air pollution during this protest we will continue to liaise and consult with each other.

Proposed next steps for OPH:

- 1) Martha will reach out to the client who made the complaint to see if their health concerns have improved based on media information that there are fewer trucks spread out in the downtown core. She will reiterate our caution to avoid the area with diesel exhaust as much as possible. She will share the media statement made by Dr. Etches and Donna Grey acknowledging that “the ongoing protest is exacerbating mental, physical and emotional health concerns vulnerable residents have after nearly two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a joint statement, medical officer of health Dr. Vera Etches and the city's community and social services manager Donna Gray say pollution, noise, racism and safety concerns related to the ongoing protest in the city's downtown core are negatively impacting people's health.”
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/protest-ottawa-residents-health-pandemic-1.6351443>
- 2) OPH will continue to monitor the ambient air quality in Ottawa and respond to any inquiries or complaints about air quality impacts resulting from the idling vehicles that are part of the freedom truck protest in Ottawa and liaise with the MECP as appropriate.
- 3) Prepare an email to send via the OPH duty officer for the attention of the City EOC and Ottawa Police Services Integrated Command as suggested by the client making the health complaint as follows:

To the Attention of the Corporate Duty Officer - Ottawa Public Health has received numerous concerns regarding idling vehicles that are part of the truck occupation of the downtown areas of Ottawa. We have responded with information and advice that is consistent with the City and Ottawa Police Services who are leading this emergency response as follows:

“The City and the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) have been managing multiple dimensions of the protest with the health and safety of city staff, the public, and protesters first and foremost in their planning.

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of all efforts from the City and OPS to address the source of these air quality concerns. I am providing this link to information on the health risks of air pollution from Health Canada for your information:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/health-risks.html>. “

However, as the protest has become entrenched and become an on-going occupation, the potential risk of exposure to diesel exhaust, that has well documented health concerns, has increased for those in impacted areas. As a result, we would like to bring this to your attention and ask that you share this with any agency conducting health and safety risk assessments during this event, including the EOC, Ottawa Police Services Integrated Command and by extension the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa. We are aware that there are several sub-populations amongst the demonstrators (e.g., children, pregnant women, and people with pre-existing cardiovascular and respiratory conditions) who would likely have prolonged exposure to the diesel exhaust pollution and who are particularly vulnerable to poor air quality. At this time, OPH does not think point source monitoring would contribute significantly to a risk assessment because it is already known that spending time in areas impacted by diesel exhaust is something that should be avoided.

Health Canada and other health and environment authorities concur that diesel emissions have direct and immediate effects on human health as well as longer term health impacts. The very small particles in diesel exhaust are small enough to penetrate deep into the lungs, where they contribute to a range of health problems. Diesel exhaust can irritate the eyes, nose, throat and lungs, and it can cause coughs, headaches, lightheadedness and nausea. Studies have found that diesel exhaust particles made people with allergies more susceptible to the materials to which they are allergic, such as dust and pollen. Exposure to diesel exhaust also causes inflammation in the lungs, which may aggravate chronic respiratory symptoms and increase the frequency or intensity of asthma attacks. The elderly and people with emphysema, asthma, and chronic heart and lung disease are especially sensitive to fine-particle pollution. Numerous studies have linked elevated particle levels in the air to increased hospital admissions, emergency room visits, asthma attacks and premature deaths among those suffering from respiratory problems. Diesel exhaust has been identified as a carcinogen. Because children's lungs and respiratory systems are still developing, they are also more susceptible than healthy adults to fine particles. Exposure to fine particles is associated with increased frequency of childhood illnesses and can also reduce lung function in children. For these reasons, exposure to diesel emissions should be limited in both the short and long term.

Sources: [*Health Effects of Diesel Exhaust - OEHHA \(ca.gov\)*](#), [*Human Health Risk Assessment for Diesel Exhaust – summary - Canada.ca*](#), [*Learn About Impacts of Diesel Exhaust and the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act \(DERA\) | US EPA*](#), [*Diesel Exhaust - Overview | Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(osha.gov\)*](#), [*pr213_E.pdf \(who.int\)*](#) IARC: DIESEL ENGINE EXHAUST CARCINOGENIC 12 June 2012, [*Health Effects of Diesel Exhaust - OEHHA \(ca.gov\)*](#)

Resources: EN: [*Air pollution: what are diesel and gasoline exhaust?*](#) FR [*H129-88-2018-fra.pdf \(PDF, 1.23 Mo\)*](#).